

LATE WOODLAND SPUDS

by
Tom Shenk
Catonsville, MD

I recently had the good fortune of acquiring three examples of a type of North American artifact that I had not spent much time studying, let alone pursuing for my hardstone collection. Even the name, "spud" drew controversy from Warren K. Moorehead in 1910, who thought the name was misleading but concluded that since no one had a better descriptive name, spud was accepted. Some study was given to this type artifact by B.W. Stephens in the early 1950's and published in the *Central States Archaeological Journal*. He concluded that there were two types, ones made of granite and ones made of flint. He also concluded that they were not utilitarian, but rather were ceremonials used as maces or emblems of authority.

Our fellow collectors in Illinois who are well acquainted with the Mississippian time period because of the great Cahokia culture, have spuds of polished flint in their collections. My friend Floyd Ritter of Collinsville, Illinois has an outstanding collection of them. I think we can safely conclude that flint spuds are Mississippian. But what about those of hardstone granites and other porphyritic materials? Are these also Mississippian? Or could they be earlier? Could they be late Woodland? Could they pre-date the flint ones found in the Cahokia Mounds? Could the people who inhabited the area of southern Ohio near the Ohio River, and who made hardstone spuds, have been the direct ancestors of those of the Cahokia culture, or just an influence in the style of artifacts?

These are interesting questions for the archaeologists, but as collectors we can raise them and perhaps provide some input to the professionals as to the styles, materials, and the origin of such hardstone spuds. During my brief research I was able to see an example of a polished granite one that closely resembles the Adams Co. Ohio spud in my collection. It was found in Fayette Co. Illinois and was labeled a Jersey Bluff type. But what I found intriguing was that it was referred to as one of the oldest examples of spuds and classified as from the late Woodland period. Accordingly, I think it is very possible that the hardstone spuds, particularly, the ones depicted in this article, are from the late Woodland time period.



Figure 1 (Shenk): Shown are three variations of hardstone spuds in my collection. From left to right: 7⁷/₈ inch from Adams Co. Ohio acquired from a friend who personally purchased from the farmer who was the finder; 10¹/₂ inch likely from Scioto Co. Ohio, ex-Dr. Kramer collection of Columbus, Ohio; and 7³/₄ inch from Wells Co. Indiana, ex-Dr. Swanderman collection of Ft. Recovery Ohio.